

2013 Work Plan

Black River State Forest

As a requirement of forest certification state forests are required to annually provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on property activities. The Black River State Forest utilizes an online format including a synopsis of the property's major work plan goals. Annual work goals are directly tied to the property's master plan, which was accepted by the Natural Resources Board in January of 2010. The master plan can be accessed online at

http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/masterplanning/documents/MP_BRSF_2010.pdf

The work plan is divided into sections on land management, development projects, recreation operations, and real estate management. Other than recreation operations all actions taken by the property are directly authorized under the property's master plan. Recreation operations are partially tied to the master plan but also a function of budget and creating management efficiencies.

Forest Management:

Forestry is one of the largest contributors to the state economy accounting for 22.6 billion dollars annually. The Black River State forest meets the highest standards for environmental quality in its forest practices being dually certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Twice each year the state forest sells tracts of timber to loggers through a competitive bidding process. Each bid opening averages 6-9 sales totaling 500-700 acres. In 2012 \$1,200,000 in timber was sold on the Black River State Forest. Timber sale revenues are deposited into the state forestry account.

State forest timber sales are a combination of thinnings and regeneration cuts. A thinning is an intermediate treatment where trees of poorer vigor and form are removed to favor higher quality future crop trees. A stand may be thinned once to several times before the final cut when it is regenerated. A regeneration cut removes the majority of the overstory trees at one time. These sites are assessed for regeneration needs at periodic cycles after the harvest is complete. If adequate natural regeneration is not present, then sites are planted or seeded to an acceptable level.

For 2013 the following forest management activities are planned:

1. Timber sales – Twenty two stands comprising 1290 acres will be reviewed for harvesting potential. These areas are shown in the map provided with this document. If you wish to comment on any stand please include the compartment and stand number. A description of how to identify compartment and stand numbers is available after the map.

2. Forest Reconnaissance – On a 20 year cycle the state forest collects information on forest type, tree density, age, and site quality from every stand on the property. This information is used to schedule forest practices such as thinning and regeneration cuts. In 2013 the state forest will update stand information on at least 5% of the entire property.
3. Forest Regeneration – One 40 acre field that was planted in 2011 and had considerable mortality likely due to last year's drought will be replanted.
4. Timber Stand Improvement – there are no plans to complete any major projects in this area for 2013.

Invasive Species Management:

Invasive species pose a serious threat to the integrity of forest ecosystems by displacing native species and negatively impacting forest regeneration. Invasives are estimated to cost 125-140 billion dollars a year to U.S. taxpayers. The state forest recently completed an invasive species plan that outlines management strategies. Techniques used to control invasives include a combination of herbicide use, hand weeding, and the use of biological controls such as Larinus beetles to infest spotted knapweed populations. The state forest specific goals for 2013 include:

1. Practice best management practices to prevent the spread of invasive species
<http://council.wisconsinforestry.org/invasives/>
2. Control garlic mustard populations along the Black River through the use of a private contractor. This is an ongoing project to limit the spread along the river.
3. Control invasive species in timber sales before and after timber operations. This will be accomplished primarily through contracting with private vendors.
4. Control invasive species in high quality native communities.
5. Monitor sites where invasives are most likely to be introduced.
6. Aggressively control any newly detected species considered a critical threat to forest regeneration.

Barrens and Karner Blue Butterfly Management:

The Black River State Forest currently receives state wildlife grant funding through June 30th to improve barrens vegetation within the property. Barrens are a globally imperiled ecosystem with Wisconsin, including the state forest, having some of the best potential areas for their restoration.

The state forest is also a recovery property for the federally endangered Karner Blue Butterfly. The property has been given a goal of attaining a population of 3,000 butterflies on an annual basis every year for five years. Barrens management provides valuable habitat for the Karner Blue and a host of other endangered and special concern species. In 2013 the state forest will focus on meeting the following goals to improve barrens habitat and maintain a viable Karner Blue Butterfly population:

1. Conduct a prescribed burn on the Smothers Road unit. This site has been identified as having a strong barrens plant composition.
2. Use a fecon mower to open up the understory of quality barrens areas and to create better connectivity between barrens sites.
3. Control spotted knapweed at key barrens restoration sites.
4. Conduct Karner Blue Butterfly surveys at key recovery sites.

Wildlife Management:

The state forest's wildlife management program is primarily focused on the Dike 17 habitat management area, flowage management, research, and population surveys. The following are the main objectives for 2013:

1. Surveys – Wildlife biologists and technicians will conduct surveys for Red-shouldered hawk, bear, wolves, deer, turkey, owls, Kirtlands warbler, Sharp-tailed grouse, eagles, osprey and the furbearers. Sampling for CWD will also be conducted on at least 75 deer, some of which will come from BRSF properties through hunter harvested deer.
2. Land management – All flowage dikes will be mowed to keep them clear of trees and brush. Control efforts will be conducted on black locust (invasive species) on the Dike 17 Wildlife Area through mechanical mowing and spot treatment with herbicides (Transline or Milestone). One prescribed burn is planned for Dike 17 given the proper conditions. Access roads will be mowed and maintained leading into the fields at Battle Point, Wilson Flowage, Whitetail Flowage, Big and Little Bear Flowages, Tanner and Partridge Crop Flowage. All parking lots will be mowed and property signs will be replaced as needed.
3. Research – Several studies will utilize at least a portion of the property including, a predator-prey relationship study, loon nesting, and more intensive population surveys of bears and bobcats.
4. Elk - In December of 2012 the Natural Resources Board approved amendments to the Black River Elk Management Plan. The plan call for the introduction of at least 75 elk to the Black River Falls Elk Range (BRFER). The Department has identified a source of wild elk in the state of Kentucky and legislative changes

will be necessary to provide final authority to introduce the animals. In anticipation of the elk arriving, possibly as early as 2014, the Department will begin analyzing the habitat in the BRFER to determine the most appropriate location for release. The Department may also conduct habitat management projects focused on barrens and opening management that would benefit elk, including tree/brush removal, herbicide application and prescribed burning.

Development Projects:

2013 will see the completion of two ongoing projects that started in 2012 along with several new projects. Each project is described below.

1. New Office – This building started in the fall of 2012, the interior of the building was finished in early February. Exterior site work including all blacktop, sidewalks, and seeding will occur in the spring. This building is expected to be open for the public by the middle of May.
2. ATV Trails Wetland Crossing Upgrades – This spring the state forest will be focusing on upgrading all of the ATV trail wetland crossings on the Pray connector. This work is expected to be completed by June 30th. In the fall we will focus on upgrading the Wildcat loop wetland crossings. Improving this section of trail is expected to take two seasons of work and be complete by the Fall of 2014. These upgrades will protect the long term integrity of the trail system and minimize weather related closures. These projects may result in some short term trail closures, however we will limit these to weekdays only with all trails being accessible from Friday noon through Sunday.
3. New Grooming Equipment Shed – This project started in the Fall of 2012 and is essentially complete with the exception of chinking that needs to occur between the logs. This replaces the current shed located at the Wildcat lot, which is undersized to accommodate today's larger grooming equipment. This project was 50% paid for by the Black River Forest Trail Foundation.
4. Kling Road – Road Aids Project – this is a road aids project where the Department provides funding to local municipalities to improve roads important to state properties. This project will reshape Kling road, add gravel material, and improve the safety of the ROW.
5. Forest Road Improvement Projects – Two projects are slated for 2013 including improving a two mile forest owned road that connects Kling and Shale, and improving Weber road including shaping and adding gravel material. These roads are important both from a logging and a recreational, primarily hunting standpoint.

6. Castle Mound Electrification - This funded project will add electricity to eight campsites at Castle Mound. This work will be completed in the Spring prior to the re-opening of Castle Mound.
7. Castle Mound ADA Cabin – this project would convert the former Castle Mound registration station into a rental cabin for people with disabilities. This project is not currently funded but a local chapter of ARC Wisconsin is seeking funds. ARC advocates for citizens with disabilities.
8. Toilet Shower Building – This project has not been funded yet but ranked very high on the Department's capital development list for the upcoming budget. If this project is funded it is more likely to start in 2014.

Property and Recreational Operations:

2013 will see several important changes to the property's operations, several related to camping operations.

1. Consolidation of staffing into one location – The new shop and office building will allow for the first time all state forest staff to be at the same location. This will result in numerous efficiencies for the property.
2. Castle Mound re-opening and expansion of reservation season – Castle Mound Campground will re-open in the middle of May once all black top and site work is complete. With the addition of electricity to eight more sites all 14 electric sites will remain on the reservation system through mid-October.
3. Pigeon Creek Campground – Last year nine sites from Pigeon Creek were placed on the reservation system. This proved to be quite successful and in 2013 the state forest is adding an additional 10 sites to the system which will result in half of the sites being reservable and the other being first come first served. The reservation system runs from Memorial Day through Labor Day weekend.
4. Potential Horse Camp to Group Camp Conversion – A proposed master plan amendment to change the designation of the horse camp into a group camp was released for public comment in November of 2012. The Department received 45 comments and is currently preparing a decision and response based on the comments. A final recommendation is expected in March. The proposal was initiated due to extremely low use levels at the horse campground and a perceived high demand for group camping.
5. Brochure update – In 2013 the state forest will update and reprint the hike, bike, and ski brochure.

Real Estate Management:

The Black River State forest acquired a 40 acre parcel in 2012. The state forest will continue to purchase real estate from willing sellers at the fair market price. However, any potential purchase must meet a series of stringent criteria to assure that limited acquisition dollars are spent on the best parcels for conservation.

The state forest is currently identified as a potential route for both a power line that would run along the interstate corridor and a gas line that would run through the southern portion of the property. The Department is working with representatives from both interests to determine the feasibility of various routes.

Partnership Work:

The state forest works with numerous partners every year to meet mutual goals. Several of these have already been discussed in other more appropriate sections of the work plan. The following are additional partnership events the state forest will participate in during 2013.

1. Cultural Resource Protection – Each year the state forest provides a map of planned timber sales to the Cultural Resources staff of the Ho-Chunk Nation. Preservation staff are provided the opportunity to comment on any sale that could adversely impact important cultural resources.
2. Candlelight Ski – The Black River Forest Trail Foundation is the officially recognized Friends group to the state forest. Each year they plan and provide a candlelight ski event on the first Saturday night in February. This event draws 300-400 users when conditions are favorable.
3. Nature Conservancy & Barrens Restoration – Adequate staffing is often a limiting factor in planning for prescribed burning. The state forest has formed a relationship with the Conservancy to address this issue. The Nature Conservancy has available staffing to provide assistance with prescribed burns on high quality barrens areas.
4. Snowmobile grooming and maintenance – The state forest conveyed all snowmobile trail responsibilities to Jackson County starting the winter of 2011. This arrangement has freed up state forest staff to work on other priorities. This relationship will continue in 2013.
5. ATV trail enforcement – The state forest will continue their relationship with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department to provide an on trail enforcement officer during peak use times. This arrangement provided economic efficiencies for the property by not having to recruit, hire, train, and equip a state forest officer.

Comments:

Comments on the 2013 Black River State Forest Work Plan should be directed via phone, mail, or email to:

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Comments must be received by March 11th 2013